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The Right Reverend E. Lackey,
Anglican Archbishop of Ottawa,
c/o Rev Gary Hauch,
Alta-Vista Anglican Church,
2345 Alta-Vista Dr.,
Ottawa.

10 November 1988

Dear Reverend Lackey,

Thank you again for your assistance last summer. Your help and that of others, including family, other churches, and friends helped me continue working through the summer. That was of particular advantage to people disabled by pollution in that it allowed further work just when efforts were beginning to be rewarded.

Since you responded, the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission has become involved, and members of all three parties have made statements in the House of Commons calling on government to help. It took three years to move the issue to the brink of the House of Commons; it would have been a shame not to have continued efforts just as they were about to pay off.

The Acting Executive Director of the Secretariat Responsible for the Status of Disabled Persons has also agreed to help, working in conjunction with the Canadian Human Rights Commission - Police Section. Perhaps the most encouraging development is that these authorities have agreed to work with the president of the largest related self-help group in the country, the Human Ecology Foundation of Canada.

It is profoundly heartening to see the current president, Mr. Ed Lowans, of Caledon East, receiving a much more enthusiastic reception than that extended to previous executive members who have approached Health and Welfare over the past quarter-century. It was beginning to seem as if the government wasn't going to recognize "Twentieth Century Disease" in the twentieth century!

Unfortunately, even though Mr. Epp has responded to recent appeals with a private recognition of our legitimacy, there remain difficulties for people affected, largely as a result of previous government actions.

Prior to Mr. Epp's recognition of the problem, Health and Welfare

officials repeatedly stated that victims were deluded, imagining their problem due to psychological stress. Our experience as human beings was contradicted, not on the basis of information, but on the basis of an absence of information.

In other words, Health and Welfare officials publicly called into question the integrity and legitimacy of people affected without cause. As a result of statements by officials, people suffered a general loss of credibility in the community. Families broke up. Professional reputations were ruined. Careers ended. Some people became so frustrated and demoralized that they took their own lives.

Now that the department recognizes the problem, we could look on this as water under the bridge, an unfortunate consequence of the ignorance (and arrogance) of officials, except for three factors:

1. People whose lives were derailed are for the most part still living, and would prefer that their were lives not dismissed as water under the bridge. I submit they deserve a hand up now that previous comments are understood to have been inappropriate.

2. Misconceptions created by government continue uncorrected in some parts of the country, contributing to the continued frustration of people affected. Surely, as the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission states, "We owe it to people who have the misfortune to suffer from this syndrome to be more public and more positive in acknowledging that... environmental hypersensitivity is a true medical problem."

3. Most people involved in the issue, whether professionals or lay persons, feel that there are probably large numbers of Canadians who suffer chronic health problems as a result of environmental sensitivity, but whose illness has not been properly diagnosed because of the unhealthy level of skepticism fostered by officials.

Many of these people would suffer psychiatric symptoms, as the illness often affects the central nervous system. You may be aware that many deaf people were institutionalized as "retarded" when actually their developmental delay was only a function of reduced communication skills. Some of us feel a close kinship to deaf people who have spent twenty or thirty years inappropriately under psychiatric supervision before being rescued!

The above points could be addressed fairly simply, perhaps as follows:

1. Departmental officials or the next Minister of Health and Welfare could meet with people affected to work out a settlement. It seems damages could be assessed in cases where people suffered directly as a result of Health and Welfare's comments, but for the rest a settlement would probably consist of funding for community self-help and professional groups, as in the settlement

for so-called Japanese-Canadians who were unfairly interned in World War II.

2. The department could run a public information campaign similar in magnitude to the millions of dollars of free media it received when calling into question the victims' integrity. In journalism, if we report on page one that someone is charged with a crime, we're compelled to report an acquittal on page one as well.

3. The department could send out the word to provincial health ministries, perhaps providing funds to help identify and rescue people whose chronic health problems can be related to environmental factors. These people would have been identified sooner if our public education efforts had not been hampered by officials' statements.

It is important for governments to be responsible for the consequences of their own actions, in the same way all of us are. Perhaps the next group which comes forward with a poorly understood problem will not be so quickly be labelled as deluded.

I wonder if given your apparently strong interest in both the environment and matters concerning the dignity of persons you might publicly ask the three major parties to address these points as part of their election campaigns?

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A recent brief to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Welfare by the Human Ecology Foundation listed attitudinal pollution ahead of environmental pollution as a concern. Given the fact that government contributed to the problematic attitudes, political candidates could be asked how they might correct public misconceptions if elected to office.

Only when unfair attitudes have been addressed will the needs of people disabled by pollution be considered equally beside other concerns.

Sincerely,



Chris Brown
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cc Ed Lowans, President, Human Ecology Foundation of Canada
Anne Castle, President, HEF Ottawa Chapter
Dr. John Molot, M.D., Candian Society for Clinical Ecology and
Environmental Medicine (CSCEEM)